

COLUMNS

Mobile ad blocking is not a crisis yet

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Ad blocking is a hot topic made hotter by the launch of Apple iOS 9, which gave developers permission to create ad blockers on Safari mobile. Samsung recently followed suit, allowing ad blocking in its native mobile browser. It also gave advertisers a scare, but there is no reason to panic. While blocking ads on desktop browsers is common, it is still relatively rare on mobile.

Apple acted quickly to curtail in-application ad blocking out of concerns around privacy and the potential interception of data between the user and the apps they use, but also perhaps out of concern it would strip app developers of their ability to monetize great content.

Apple was quick to remove the first in-app ad-blocking app from the Apple Store and has continued to remove others. The company also issued a refund to users who bought the top ad-blocking app known as Peace. It was an unusual move for Apple, removing any doubt about their stance on in-app ad blocking.

Google was quick to remove the first Samsung mobile browser ad blocker from the Google Play store for violations of its developer agreement. It is clear that the ad blocking war is on.

Same page?

Today, iOS ad blockers can only block ads on the mobile Web, and users spend relatively little time surfing in-browser while mobile.

Instead, mobile users spend 86 percent of their time in the protected space of apps, which consequently limits the opportunity for ad blockers.

For these reasons, the threat of ad blocking in mobile is less than what many people anticipated.

While mobile activity accounts for 38 percent of all Web browsing, only 1.6 percent of ad block traffic was from mobile devices, and in-app ad blocking is virtually non-existent.

Even so, it is important for brands to understand what drives consumers to install blockers and how they can avoid being part of the consumer backlash that drives ad blocking.

These developments underscore the need for mobile ads that are relevant and that do not interfere with the user's activities, so advertisers can be sure that they are reaching the right people with a message they care about and

customers are less likely to be annoyed enough to pursue ad blocking.

Poll data from PageFair and Crystal show that privacy or security concerns are not a primary motivation for consumers who use mobile ad blockers. Rather, the top reasons were reducing visual clutter and increasing page-loading speeds.

So what can we do to address these problems?

Free for all

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) has been calling for ad size and formatting standards that will make online ads less disruptive and, as a result, less likely to prompt consumers to download ad blocking tools.

The IAB took on the issue of ad blocking for desktop users, where ad-blocking software has gained considerable traction already, causing publishers to worry about the future of monetization of digital advertising.

If the IAB can get advertisers to fall in line and avoid creating ads that interfere with the user experience, they can change the scenario so that it is actually more trouble to download a blocker than it is to view an ad.

A big part of creating ads that do not feel disruptive is to accurately deliver the ad to an interested audience.

When consumers get ads for products they actually want and use, they are more tolerant of the interruption to their mobile content.

Also, people like free stuff. In mobile, the choice to accept advertising is literally in the consumers' hands, when they choose to download free ad-supported apps.

Consumers tolerate ads if it means they get free content as long as the advertising does not create an irritating experience.

Again, relevance plays a key role.

Mum's the word

For example, let us say a married mother of two buys a lot of yogurt product for her kids. If she is playing a game on her mobile device and using apps that serve up mobile ads, she is likely to respond favorably to a promotional ad for a new yogurt pop.

If, on the other hand, this married mother of two has her game interrupted by an ad for Match.com, she is likely to be annoyed. And if this happens often enough, or the ad takes so long to load that she gets bored, she may look for an ad blocker.

Savvy retailers do audience targeting, often through purchase data or even a brand's own CRM data.

Reduce advertising frustration by understanding what your customers buy, and when.

Remember also the fun factor.

Consumers are engaged with mobile devices for gaming, shopping and emailing friends. They expect content to be fun, so make your mobile ads entertaining, readable and, most importantly, useful.

Catch attention with fun creative or useful information and a memorable message or offer but also watch the file size of your creative game. The engagement may not be worth the irritation for the consumer as the wait for it to load.

IN THE END, it is about serving relevant ads to the right people in a size and format that does not cause excessive disruption.

That is how we can protect the value of digital advertising without diminishing the user experience and without driving consumers to ad blockers.

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